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UNCLAS KUWAIT 001199

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP

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SUBJECT: SADDAM'S SECRET WEAPON: THE MIGHTY MENGASH!

1. Summary: The forced landing of a U.S. Apache attack helicopter behind Iraqi lines in the early days of the war, and the resulting implausible Iraqi claims that a heroic farmer named Mengash was responsible, have spawned a cottage industry of derision in Kuwait. Today's date (April 01), and Kuwaitis' addiction to mobile-phone text messages, helped turn the stream of jokes into a torrent. The mocking of this exaggerated Iraqi peasant hero is perhaps the most satisfying way the Kuwaitis have found to respond to their growing isolation in the Arab world, letting them vent their anger at the hostile Arab 'street' without losing their cool. End Summary.

2. Those familiar with Kuwait are used to hearing the incessant tones of incoming cellular phone calls and beeps of newly received text messages. Along with those beeps these days, however, one is liable to hear the accompanying laughter of Kuwaitis who have just received the latest Mengash joke.

3. Baghdad's rustic hero is sarcastically "credited" with everything from fending off anthrax to shooting down the space shuttle Columbia. While we have yet to see Mengash T-shirts on the streets, the phrase "I (heart) Mengash" has already flashed across the screens of mobile phones throughout the country and been printed in newspapers. Why did the latest missile attack on Kuwait fail? It was Mengash, joke the Kuwaitis, who mistook an outbound missile for an inbound one and shot it out of the sky, such is his skill! He is the equal of ten Republican Guard Divisions and an invincible leader! He is so awesome, he even shot down an American submarine! The Iraqis should clone him! In fact, it's already being done! Saddam started pumping money into a cloning program to save his battered regime as soon as Mengash performed his heroic feat. Indeed, with his WWI era rifle and a steady aim, Mengash is the source of all Iraqi military victories, at least in the Kuwaiti telling.

4. In Mengash, the Kuwaitis have found the perfect psychological antidote to the Iraqi regime's over-the-top propaganda. While the rest of the Arab world swallows the noxious brew, Kuwaitis, who recognize it for what it is, no longer have to seethe, they can laugh it off.
JONES